

Section D-1

Role of Family Readiness Program

The contents of this Toolkit have been developed to assist you in your efforts to support family readiness. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided is current and accurate. However, because statutory and regulatory changes may have occurred since the publication of this Toolkit, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs cannot assume responsibility for its continued accuracy. Before taking any significant action based on the contents of this Toolkit, you should contact a subject matter expert in your chain of command to secure the most current information.

Role of Family Readiness Program

The well-being of Guard and Reserve units is intrinsically linked to the readiness of the force. A vital element of unit readiness is family readiness. Caring for and supporting families is the core of this nation's busy and unified military force and the role of family readiness programs. The family readiness program is often relied upon as the preferred source of expert information on families as well as an information and referral program linking the unit, families, and community resources.

Family readiness programs are bound by a common purpose of preparing families to manage the demands and challenges of military life. The Department of Defense (DoD) and the Services have made significant progress in enhancing family readiness programs. Joint service workshops, conferences and meetings focusing on family readiness are becoming routine, accepted, and expected as part of day-to-day business. The military Services and organizations are working together to share ideas and resources for the common goal of supporting service members and their families. Defense leaders are committed to enhancing family readiness.

In September 1999, the National Guard and Reserve Family Readiness Strategic Planning conference was held bringing together all Guard and Reserve components, family readiness program coordinators and volunteers. They developed a vision for family readiness that emphasized their similarities and common goals. The DoD and service family readiness initiatives have been highlighted by recent joint service family program workshops, service and unit web pages, and the development of a readiness support web site that contains quality of life support information, <http://www.defenselink.mil/ra/family/toolkit/>.

Family readiness should be high on a commander's list of priorities. It impacts other aspects of the Guard and Reserve mission such as retaining service members and sustaining mission readiness. Family readiness efforts have become increasingly more advanced and complex. Family readiness programs provide assistance, resources, and support to families before, during and after times of mobilization, local or national emergencies, disasters, deployments, and separations. The larger goal of any family readiness program is to encourage families to function successfully within the unit support network when separations and deployments occur. Commanders and service members alike are not content to see their families merely surviving separations and deployments, but are instead seeking to build well-prepared, self-reliant families who can thrive and grow before, during, and after these challenging events.

As family readiness program staff members, you serve as the right arm of the commander and are responsible for developing and implementing unit family readiness programs and initiatives. Your role is no less important than that of other staff activities. It is not enough to be passive or reactive subject matter experts. Instead, you must work closely with the commander to ensure that family readiness receives the necessary resources and command group attention. You must emulate the proactive planning and budgeting role fulfilled by other command staff activities. If family readiness is to be valued as the important mission support activity that it is, then it must be managed in a professional manner. As the staff proponent for family readiness, long-term, immediate, near-term sound planning and execution must be the hallmark of your efforts.

Program managers promote family preparedness through education, outreach to family members, and participation in readiness support. It is through the unit family readiness program that concerns and questions of family members are identified to unit leadership. The family readiness program is comprehensive, including family readiness liaisons; unit and personnel administrators; specialists in programs such as financial management, family advocacy, and community outreach; and volunteers. The most successful family readiness programs are tailored to the needs of individual units. A significant attribute of an effective family readiness program is a sense of community among its members and families.

Family Readiness Programs rely on seven distinct components:

- Information and referral
- Education
- Outreach to family members
- Coordination with community resources and organizations
- Volunteers
- Unit family readiness groups (FRG)
- Special events and activities

Family readiness requires a constant effort to capitalize on new capabilities and concepts. What has worked in the past must be examined carefully to ensure that new and better methods are considered and, when appropriate, adopted. The significance of Internet-based resources to the National Guard and Reserve cannot be overlooked. Most members are geographically dispersed and are not physically located on or near a military installation. The Internet cannot take the place of family readiness program staff, but it provides an accessible, comprehensive resource for service members and family members alike and can be linked to specific unit web pages and local sources of support.

The number of deployments for Guard and Reserve units has risen steadily during the past five years. Guard and Reserve units and individuals have been used to support and supplement the active duty forces for a total of 12.5 to 13.5 million duty days per year. Established and effective family readiness programs and inter-service family assistance councils are becoming increasingly more important to make sure that deployed service members and their families are receiving the best support possible. Family readiness programs not only benefit service members and their families, but also have a positive impact on a unit's morale and readiness.